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SUBJECT: SEEKING SHEN HAO: FACT-CHECKING ANHUI'S MODEL RURAL CADRE

REF: SHANGHAI 42

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Eager to promote the model of selfless party cadre, Chinese media recently launched an extensive campaign to emulate Shen Hao, Communist Party secretary of a village in eastern Anhui closely tied to the beginnings of China's rural economic reforms three decades ago. Although Shen, who died of a heart attack at age 45, is being praised as a "moral model," contacts in Anhui indicated Shen's success in securing government resources for his village was the real factor that brought him to national attention. Several observers speculated that the burden of official entertainment to support his development agenda contributed to Shen's early death. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During a January 27-28 visit to the Anhui provincial capital of Hefei, CongenOffs asked contacts to share their views on Shen Hao, the local cadre in eastern Anhui praised extensively by national media for "selfless service" following his death in November 2009.

¶13. (SBU) Shen was Party Secretary of Xiaogang Village in Central China's Anhui Province, a hamlet extolled as the launching point for China's first set of rural economic reforms in 1978. Farmers in Xiaogang initiated the "household contract responsibility system" that moved China away from collective agriculture and established the foundation for China's current system of household-based agriculture. Communist Party General Secretary Hu Jintao, a native of Anhui Province, visited Xiaogang in September 2008 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the contract responsibility system and to explain his land reform agenda in advance of that fall's Central Committee plenary session, which focused on the rural economy. During Hu's visit, Xiaogang Party Secretary Shen Hao reportedly stated that the village was preparing to lead a new round of reforms.

Shen Hao: The Model Cadre

¶14. (SBU) Two months after Shen's death from a heart attack on November 6, 2009, government-controlled media launched a campaign in mid-January featuring tearful retrospectives lauding Shen's efforts to improve livelihoods during his six-year tenure in Xiaogang. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping described Shen as a "modern Communist Party village cadre," posthumously

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honoring Shen on January 13 with the title of "national outstanding Communist Party member" and calling him "the people's civil servant." National media reported that Shen's work to build infrastructure and improve housing had led to a near three-fold increase in average income from RMB 2300 to RMB 6600 per capita during his tenure.

Widespread Admiration for "Selfless Servant"

¶15. (SBU) Many netizens voiced widespread admiration for Shen, writing in their blogs that the village chief died "in the line of duty" and should be recognized as a "hero." Anhui University professor Zhang Deyuan told CongenOffs on January 28 that Shen was a "moral model" in a political system sorely lacking in examples of virtue. Provincial government officials also praised Shen's work. Anhui Human Resources and Social Security Bureau Policy and Legislative Division Director Peng Jiahai said Shen "epitomized the principle to work for the people." Specifically, Shen's efforts to coordinate rural and urban development in an important area for agricultural production deserved accolades, stated Anhui Provincial Development and Reform Commission Comprehensive Economy Department Director Guo Hao.

Economic Development Key to Shen's Success

¶16. (SBU) Contacts agreed, however, that Shen's economic success was the primary reason for the national adulation. Professor Zhang Deyuan stated emphatically that Shen Hao's economic record

in Xiaogang was far more important than his "values." Shen, who previously worked for the Anhui Provincial Finance Bureau, used his network of contacts in Hefei to support his efforts in Xiaogang, according to Anhui Academy of Social Sciences researcher Lu Liansheng. For example, Lu said, Shen successfully applied for a RMB 8 million (approximately USD 1.18 million) special development fund for the village and helped each village family obtain a RMB 20,000-80,000 subsidy from provincial finances, both of which contributed to the three-fold increase in per capita income.

"You Can Only Be a Hero When You're Dead"

¶7. (SBU) In the midst of effusive official praise, some controversy surrounding Shen's death has also emerged, our contacts said. The circumstances of Shen's demise still are under investigation, but his young age (45) and the timing of his heart attack in the wake of three official banquets, sparked the blogosphere and Anhui residents to speculate that excess alcohol consumption could have been a contributing factor. While many residents lauded Shen's work ethic, they acknowledged that much of his work included hosting banquets for visiting central and provincial government officials. "Drinking was an

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unavoidable task," said Zhang Deyuan. Several contacts told CongenOffs that local officials [cannot be praised publicly while still in office, or even when they are still alive, because they still are liable to make mistakes. In China, said Anhui Provincial Foreign Affairs Deputy Director General Lu Youqin, "You can only be a hero when you're dead."

Learn from Shen Hao?

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Developing cadres who are both virtuous and capable is an oft-repeated goal of the Chinese Communist Party, and the media blitz about Shen Hao carries all the hallmarks of a classic Central Propaganda Department emulation campaign, including a deceased hero no longer capable of bad behavior. Ironically, however, observers in Anhui pointed to Shen's success in "working the system," more than his personal morality, as the factor which brought him to the attention of China's top leaders. In the end, it may have been that system -- which still often demands catering to officials' private pleasures in order to address public needs -- that killed Anhui's "model cadre." End Comment.

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